

The very Beggars Petition against Popery.

Wherein they lamentably complain to King Henry the Eighth of the Clergy:

1. Of their abominable Covetousness and Oppression, in several Particulars; from § 3, to § 13. 2. Of their insatiable Lechery, being Devils at Women; and how they apply themselves, by all Sleights they may, to have to do with every Man's Wife, Daughter, and Maid, (as well Ladies, as meaner Persons, when they come in their Way); from § 13, to § 17. 3. They brought in Theft with them, and nourished it under them; § 17. 4. That they baffled all Laws; that none could take hold of them, though they ravished Men's Wives and Daughters, (which that cursed Crew would be at again, though not in that seeming holy Method, but now in an open, odious, debauched Way, like infernal Incubusses, who now have naturalized Succubusses for their Turn, &c.) for the Law was too weak to hold them; they making such as begin with them quickly to cease prosecuting them; § 18. 5. An Example hereof, see in the Bishop of London; § 19. 6. Though the Statute of Mortmain was made to prevent giving them any more, yet still they got more than any Duke; § 20 and 21. 7. Their yearly Exactions came by cursed Pretensions of praying People's Souls out of Purgatory, &c. § 22. 8. This Doctrine of Purgatory was always opposed by godly, learned Men; § 23 and 24. 9. Their hellish Policy, in not suffering the New Testament to be translated in the Mother-Tongue, lest their Hypocrisy and Cheating should be discovered; § 25, 26. 10. The Impudence of Dr. Allen, and Dr. Horsey, fined to the King, but afterwards therefore amply rewarded by the Clergy; § 27. 11. The Reason of this was, because the Chancellor was one of them, viz. a Clergyman; § 28. 12. The Cheat of giving Lands, or Money, to the Church for the Poor, or Masses; § 30. 13. They petition to turn these Blood-suppers out to labour, and get them Wives of their own; § 31. 14. The Benefits and Advantages of so doing, &c. § 31, 32. (These Arguments, and the like, prevailed with this King to cast off the Pope's Authority, and why any should be so foolishly wicked, as to think to return us to it, I know not; most certainly they will find themselves deceived, with a Vengeance, &c.)

Presented to King Henry the Eighth, in the Twenty-ninth Year of his Reign, *Anno Dom.* 1538, eight Years before his Death; and now printed *verbatim*, from a very old Copy, only mending the Authography, for the Ease of the Reader; making the several Sections, and collecting the foregoing Contents. (Worth perusing by both Papist and Protestant, for the one to see how his Forefathers and he have been, and are, gulled; and the other to see how he is like to be eternally abused, if he either through fear of Death, or otherwise, embrace Popery.)

[Folio, containing Six Pages; with a wooden Cut in the Title, representing King Henry the Eighth on his Throne, and a Committee of Beggars presenting their Petition.]

To the KING, our Sovereign Lord.

MOST lamentably complaineth, their woful misery unto your Highness, your poor daily bede-men¹, the wretched, hideous monsters (on whom scarcely for horror

¹ This is an ancient word, signifying a poor alms-man, who pray daily for their benefactors; derived from the Saxon word *bidden*, to pray.

any eye dare look), the foul, unhappy sort of lepers, and other sore people, needy, impotent, blind, lame, and sick, that live only by alms; how that their number is daily so sore increased, that all the alms of the well-disposed people of this your realm is not half enough to sustain them; but that, for very constraint, they die for hunger.

2. And this most pestilent mischief is come upon your said poor bedemen, by the reason that there is (in the times of your noble predecessors passed) craftily crept into this your realm another sort² (not of impotent, but) of strong, puissant, and counterfeit-holy, and idle beggars, and vagabonds, which, since the time of their first entry, by all the craft and wiliness of Satan, are now increased under your sight, not only into a great number, but also into a kingdom.

3. These are not the herds (or sheep), but the ravenous wolves, going in herds-clothing, devouring the flock; the bishops, abbots, priors, deacons, archdeacons, suffragans, priests, monks, canons, friars, pardoners and somners. And who is able to number this idle, ravenous sort, which (setting all labour aside) have begged so importunately, that they have gotten into their hands more than the third part of all your realm: the goodliest lordships, manors, lands, and territories are theirs. Besides this, they have the tenth part of all the corn, meadow, pasture, grass, wool, colts, calves, lambs, pigs, geese, and chickens. Over and besides the tenth part of every servant's wages, the tenth part of the wool, milk, honey, wax, cheese, and butter. Yea, and they look so narrowly upon their profits, that the poor wives must be accountable to them for every tenth egg, or else she getteth not her rights at Easter, shall be taken as an heretick; hereto have they their four offering-days.

4. What money pull they in by probates of testaments, privy tithes, and by men's offerings to their pilgrimages, and at their first masses. Every man and child that is buried must pay somewhat for masses and dirges³ to be sung for him, or else they will accuse the dead's friends and executors of heresy. What money get they by mortuaries⁴, by hearing of confessions, (and yet they will keep thereof no counsel,) by hallowing of churches, altars, super-altars⁵, chapels, and bells; by cursing of men, and absolving them again for money.

5. What multitude of money gather the pardoners⁶ in a year? How much money get the somners (i. e. parators) by extortion in a year? By citing the people to the commissaries court, and afterwards releasing their appearance for money. Finally, the infinite number of beggars friars, what get they in a year?

6. Here, if it please your Grace to mark, ye shall see a thing far out of joint; there are within your realm of England fifty-two thousand parish-churches; and this standing, that there be but ten households in every parish, yet are there five-hundred thousand, and twenty-thousand households; and of every of these households hath every of the five orders of friars a penny a quarter for every order; that is, for all the five orders five pence a quarter for every house; that is, for all the five orders twenty pence a year for every house: *Summa*, five-hundred thousand, and twenty-thousand quarters of angels; that is, two-hundred and sixty thousand half-angels; *Summa*, one hundred and thirty thousand angels: *Summa totalis*, forty-four thousand pounds, and three-hundred and thirty-three pounds, six shillings, and eight-pence sterling: whereof, not four-hundred years passed, they had not one penny. Oh, grievous and painful exactions, thus yearly to be paid; from the which the people of your noble predecessors, the Kings of the ancient Britons⁷, ever stood free.

² See them described in the second §.

³ The dead-office in the Church of Rome, which begins with *Dirige me, Domine*, &c.

⁴ A mortuary was a gift left by a man, at his death, to his parish-church; for the recompence of his personal tithes and offerings, not duly paid in his life-time.

⁵ These are square stones, to be removed at the priest's pleasure, to say mass upon; by some called 'portable altars.'

⁶ Those employed by the Pope to grant indulgences.

⁷ Before the Conquest: for William the Conqueror, having engaged the Pope to countenance his unjust invasion upon this Isle, in return, oppressed the subjects in this manner, to gratify the Pope.

7. And this will they have, or else they will procure him that will not give it them, to be taken as an heretick. What tyrant ever oppressed the people like this cruel and vengeable generation? What subjects shall be able to help their Prince, that be after this fashion yearly polled? What good Christian people can be able to succour us poor lepers, blind, sore, and lame, that be thus yearly oppressed? Is it any marvel that your people so complain of poverty? Is it any marvel that the taxes, fifteenths, and subsidies, that your Grace, most tenderly of great compassion, hath taken among your people, to defend them from the threatened ruin of their commonwealth, have been so slothfully, yea painfully, levied? Seeing that almost the uttermost penny that might have been levied, hath been gathered before, verily by this ravenous, cruel, and insatiable generation.

8. The Danes, neither the Saxons, in the time of the ancient Britons, should never have been able to have brought their armies, from so far, hither unto your land to have conquered it, if they had at that time such a sort of idle gluttons to find at home. The noble King Arthur had never been able to have carried his army to the foot of the mountains, to resist the coming down of Lucius the Emperor, if such yearly exactions had been taken of his people. The Greeks had never been able to have so long continued at the siege of Troy, if they had had at home such an idle sort of cormorants to fine. The ancient Romans had never been able to put all the whole world under their obeisance, if their people had been thus oppressed.

9. The Turk, now in your time, should never be able to get so much ground of Christendom, if he had in his empire such a sort of locusts to devour his substance. Lay then these sums to the aforesaid third part of the possessions of the realm, that you may see whether it draw nigh unto the half of the whole substance of the realm, or not; so shall you find that it draweth far above.

10. Now let us then compare the number of this unkind, idle sort unto the number of the lay-people; and we shall see whether it be indifferently shifted or not, that they should have half? Compare them to the number of men; so are they not the hundredth person. Compare them to men, women, and children; then are they not the four-hundredth person in number. One part therefore, in four-hundred parts divided, were too much for them, except they did labour. What an unequal burthen is it, that they have half with the multitudes, and are not the four-hundredth person of their number? What tongue is able to tell, that ever there was any commonwealth so sore oppressed, since the world began?

11. And what do all these greedy sort of sturdy, idle, holy thieves, with these yearly exactions that they take of the people? Truly nothing, but exempt themselves from the obedience and dignity from your Grace unto them; nothing, but that your subjects should fall into disobedience and rebellion against your Grace, and be under them? As they did unto your noble predecessor King John, which, because that he would have punished certain traitors that had conspired with the French King to have deposed him from his crown and dignity (among the which a clerk called Stephen, whom afterwards, against the King's will, the Pope made Bishop of Canterbury, was one) interdicted^s his land. For the which matter your most noble realm wrongfully, (alas, for shame!) hath stood tributary, not to any kind, temporal prince; but unto a cruel, devilish blood-supper, drunken in the blood of the Saints and Martyrs of Christ ever since. Here were a holy sort of prelates, that thus cruelly could punish such a righteous King, all his realm, and succession, for doing right.

12. Here were a charitable sort of holy men, that could thus interdict an holy realm, and pluck away the obedience of the people from their natural Liege Lord and King, for his righteousness. Here were a blessed sort, not of meek herds, but of blood-suppers, that could set the French King upon such a righteous Prince, to cause him to lose his crown and dignity; to make effusion of the blood of his people; unless this good and blessed King, of great compassion, more fearing and lamenting the shedding of the blood

^s Excommunicated.

of his people, than the loss of his crown and dignity, against all right and conscience, had submitted himself unto them. O case most horrible, that ever so noble a King's realm and succession should thus be made to stoop to such a sort of blood-suppers! Where was his sword, power, crown, and dignity become, whereby he might have done justice in this manner? Where was their obedience become, that should have been subject under his high power, in this matter? Yea, where was the obedience of all his subjects become, that for maintenance of the common-wealth, should have holpen him manfully to have resisted these blood-suppers to the shedding of their blood? Was it not altogether, by their policy, translated from this good King to them?

13. Yea, and what do they more? Truly, nothing but apply themselves (by all the sleights they may) to have to do with every man's wife, every man's daughter, and every man's maid; that cuckoldry should reign over all among your subjects; that no man should know his own child; that their bastards might inherit the possessions of every man, to put the right begotten children clear beside their inheritance, in subversion of all estates and godly order. These be they, that by their abstaining from marriage, do let the generation of the people; whereby all the realm, at length, if it should be continued, shall be made desert and uninhabitable. They mean, that for this sin of whoredom, God's vengeance would fall on the land.

14. These be they, that have made an hundred-thousand idle whores in your realm, which would have gotten their living honestly in the sweat of their faces, had not their superfluous riches elected them to unclean lust and idleness. These be they, that corrupt the whole generation of mankind in your realm; that catch the p-x of one woman, and bear it to another: yea, some one of them will boast among his fellows, that he hath meddled with an hundred women. These be they, that when they have once drawn men's wives to such incontinency, spend away their husbands' goods, make the women run away from their husbands; yea, run away themselves both with wife and goods; bring both man, wife, and children, to idleness, theft, and beggary.

15. Yea, who is able to number the great and broad bottomless ocean sea-full of evils, that this mischievous and sinful generation may lawfully bring upon us, unpunished? Where is your sword, power, crown, and dignity become, that should punish (by punishment of death, even as other men be punished) the felonies, rapes, murders, and treasons committed by this sinful generation? Where is their obedience become, that should be under your high power in this matter? Is it not altogether translated and exempted from your Grace unto them? Yes, truly. What an infinite number of people might have been increased, to have peopled the realm, if these sort of folk had been married like other men? What breach of matrimony is there brought in by them? Such truly, as was never since the world began among the whole multitude of the Heathen.

16. Who is she that will set her hands to work to get three pence a day; and may have at least twenty pence a day, to sleep an hour with a friar, a monk, or a priest? What is he that would labour for a groat a day; and may have at least twelve pence a day to be a bawd to a priest, a monk, or a friar? What a sort are there of them that marry priests, sovereign ladies, but to cloak the priests' incontinency; and that they may have a living of the priests themselves, for their labour? How many thousands doth such lubricity bring to beggary, theft, and idleness, which should have kept their good name, and have set themselves to work, had there not been this excessive treasure of the spirituality? What honest man dare take any man or woman in his service, that hath been at such a school with a spiritual man?

17. Oh the grievous shipwreck of the common-wealth! which, in ancient time, before the coming in of these ravenous wolves, was so prosperous that then there were but few thieves; yea, theft was at that time so rare, that Cæsar was not compelled to make penalty of death upon felony; as your Grace may well perceive in his 'Institutes.' There were also at that time but few poor people, and yet they did not beg, but there was given them enough unasked. For there were at that time none of these ravenous wolves to ask

it from them, as it appeareth in the 'Acts of the Apostles.' Is it any marvel, though there be now so many beggars, thieves, and idle people? No, truly.

18. What remedy? Make laws against them? I am in doubt whether ye be able. Are they not stronger in your own parliament-house than yourself? What a number of bishops, abbots, and priors are lords of your parliament? Are not all the learned men in your realm in fee with them, to speak in your parliament-house against your crown, dignity, and common-wealth of your realm, a few of your own learned council only excepted? What law can be made against them that may be available? Who is he (though he be grieved never so sore) for the murder of his ancestor, ravishment of his wife, of his daughter; robbery, trespass, maim, debt, or any other offence, dare lay it to their charge, by any way of action? and, if he do, then is he, by-and-by, by their wiliness, accused of heresy. Yea, they will so handle him, before he pass; that, except he will bear a faggot for their pleasure, he shall be excommunicated, and then be all his actions dashed! So captive are your laws unto them, that no man that they list to excommunicate, may be admitted to sue any action in any of your courts. If any man in your sessions dare be so hardy to indict a priest of any such crime; he hath, before the year goeth out, such a yoke of heresy laid in his neck, that it makes him wish, that he had not done it.

19. Your Grace may see what a work there is in London; how the bishop rageth for indicting of certain curates of extortion and incontineny, the last year, in the Warmol-Quest⁹. Had not Richard Hunne commenced an action of præmunire against a priest; he had been yet alive, and no heretick at all, but an honest man.

20. Did not divers of your noble progenitors, seeing their crown and dignity run into ruin, and to be thus craftily translated into the hands of this mischievous generation, make divers statutes for the reformation thereof? among which the statute of Mortmain was one; to the intent, that after that time, they should have no more given unto them. But what availed it? Have they not gotten into their hands more lands since, than any duke in England, the statute notwithstanding? Yea, have they not, for all that, translated into their hands from your Grace half your kingdom thoroughly? The whole name, as reason is for the ancienty of your kingdom, which was before theirs, and out of the which theirs is grown, only abiding with your Grace, and of one kingdom made twain; the spiritual kingdom (as they call it), for they will be named first, and your temporal kingdom. And which of these two kingdoms, suppose ye, is like to overgrow the other; yea, to put the other out of memory? Truly, the kingdom of the blood-suppers, for to them is given daily out of your kingdom: and that, that is once given them, cometh never from them again. Such laws have they, that none of them may neither give, nor sell nothing.

21. What law can be made so strong against them, that they, either with money or else with other policy, will not break and set at nought? What kingdom can endure, that ever giveth thus from him, and receiveth nothing again? O, how all the substance of your realm, forthwith, your sword, power, crown, dignity, and obedience of your people, runneth headlong into the insatiable whirlpool of these greedy *goulafres*¹⁰ to be swallowed and devoured!

22. Neither have they any other colour to gather these yearly exactions into their hands, but that they say, they pray for us to God to deliver our souls out of the pains of purgatory; without whose prayer, they say, or at least, without the Pope's pardon, we could never be delivered thence: which, if it be true, then is it good reason, we give them all these things, all, were it a hundred times as much.

23. But there be many men of great literature and judgment, for the love they have unto the truth, and unto the common-wealth, have not feared to put themselves into the greatest infamy that may be, in abjection of all the world; yea, in peril of death, to declare their opinion in this matter: which is, that there is no purgatory, but that it is a

⁹ Or Wardmote-Inquest, erected 32 Hen. VIII. 17.

¹⁰ [Gluttons.]

thing invented by the covetousness of the spirituality, only to translate all kingdoms from all other princes unto them; and there is not one word spoken of it in holy Scripture. They say also, that if there were a purgatory, and also if that the Pope, with his pardons for money, deliver one soul thus, he may deliver him as well without money; if he may deliver one, he may deliver a thousand; if he may deliver a thousand, he may deliver them all, and also destroy purgatory. And then is he a cruel tyrant without all charity, if he keep them there in prison and in pain, till men will give him money.

24. Likewise say they, of all the whole sort of the spirituality, that if they will not pray for no man, but for them that give them money, they are tyrants, and lack charity; and suffer those souls to be punished and pained uncharitably, for lack of their prayers. These sort of folk, they call Hereticks, these they burn, these they rage against, put to open shame, and make them bear faggots. But, whether they be Hereticks or no, well I wot, that this purgatory, and the Pope's pardons, is all the cause of translation of your kingdom so fast into their hands; wherefore, it is manifest, it cannot be of Christ; for he gave more to the temporal kingdom; he himself paid tribute to Cæsar, he took nothing from him, but taught that the high powers should be always obeyed; yea, himself (although he were most free Lord of all, and innocent) was obedient unto the high powers, unto death.

25. This is the great scab, why they will not let the New Testament go abroad in your mother-tongue, lest men should espy, that their cloaked hypocrisy, do translate thus fast your kingdom into their hands; that they are cruel, unclean, unmerciful, and hypocrites; that they seek not the honour of Christ, but their own; that remission of sins is not given by the Pope's pardon, but by Christ; for the sure faith and trust we have in him. Here may your Grace well perceive, that except ye suffer their hypocrisy to be disclosed, all is like to run into their hands; and, as long as it is covered, so long shall it seem to every man to be a great impiety not to give them. For this I am sure, your Grace thinketh (as the truth is) I am as good a man as my father; why may I not give them as much as my father did? And of this mind I am sure are all the lords, knights, esquires, gentlemen, and yeomen in England: yea, and until it be disclosed, all your people will think that your statute of Mortmain was never made with a good conscience, seeing that it taketh away the liberty of your people, in that they may not as lawfully buy their souls out of purgatory, by giving to the spirituality, as their predecessors did in times past.

26. Wherefore, if you will eschew the ruin of your crown and dignity, let their hypocrisy be uttered; and that shall be more speedful in this matter, than all the laws that may be made, be they never so strong. For, to make a law, for to punish any offender, except it were more for to give other men an ensample to beware to commit such like offence, what should it avail? Did not Dr. Allen, most presumptuously, now in your time, against all his allegiance, all that ever he could to pull from you the knowledge of such pleas, as belong unto your high courts, unto another court; in derogation of your crown and dignity.

27. Did not also Dr. Horsey and his complices most heinously, as all the world knoweth, murder, in prison, that honest merchant, Richard Hunne? for that he sued your writ of præmunire against a priest, that wrongfully held him in plea, in a spiritual court, for a matter whereof the knowledge belongeth unto your high courts: and what punishment was there done, that any man might take example of, to beware of like offence? Truly none, but that the one paid five-hundred pounds (as it is said, to the building of your Star-chamber), and when that payment was once passed, the captains of his kingdom (because he fought so manfully against your crown and dignity) have heaped to him benefice upon benefice, so that he is rewarded ten times as much. The other, as it is said, paid six-hundred pounds, for him and his complices; which, because that he had likewise fought so manfully against your crown and dignity, was immediately, as he had obtained your most gracious pardon, promoted by the captains of his kingdom, with benefice upon benefice, to the value of four times as much. Who can take example of this punishment to beware of such like offence? Who is he of their kingdom that will not rather

take courage to commit like offence, seeing the promotions that fell to these men, for their so offending? So weak and blunt is your sword, to strike at one of the offenders of this 'crooked and perverse generation.'

28. And this is, by reason that the chief instrument of your law; yea, the chief of your council, and he which hath your sword in his hand, to whom also all other instruments are obedient; is always a spiritual man, which hath ever such an inordinate love unto his own kingdom, that he will maintain that, though all the temporal kingdoms and commonwealths of the world should utterly therefore be undone.

29. Here leave we out the greatest matter of all; lest we, declaring such an horrible carrion of evil, against the ministers of iniquity, should seem to declare the one only fault, or rather the ignorance of our best beloved minister of tightwiseness, which is to be hid, till he may be learned, by these small enormities that we have spoken of, to know it plainly himself. But what remedy to relieve us, your poor, sick, lame, and sore bedemen? To make many hospitals for the relief of the poor people; nay truly, the more the worse; for ever the fat of the whole foundation hangeth on the priests' beards.

30. Divers of your noble predecessors, Kings of this realm, have given lands to monasteries, to give a certain sum of money yearly to the people; whereof, for the ancient of the time, they give never one penny. They have likewise given to them to have certain masses said daily for them (the dead), whereof they never said one. If the Abbot of Westminster should sing every day as many masses for his founders, as he is bound to do by his foundation, a thousand monks were too few.

31. Wherefore, if your Grace will build a sure hospital, that never shall fail to relieve us, your bedemen; so take from them all those things. Set their sturdy loobies abroad in the world, to get them wives of their own, to get their living with their labour, 'in the sweat of their faces,' according to the commandment of God, Gen. iii. to give other idle people, by their example, occasion to go to labour. Tie these holy, idle thieves, to the carts; to be whipped naked about every market-town till they will fall to labour; that they may, by their importunate begging, not take away the alms that the good Christian people would give unto us, sore, impotent, miserable people, your bedemen. Then shall as well the number of our foresaid monstrous sort, as bawds, whores, thieves, and idle people decrease. Then shall these great yearly exactions cease. Then shall not your sword, power, crown, dignity, and obedience of your people be translated from you. Then shall you have full obedience of your people. Then shall the idle people be set to work.

32. Lastly, then shall matrimony be much better kept. Then shall the generation of your people be increased. Then shall your commons increase in riches. N. B. Then shall the Gospel be preached. Then shall none beg our alms from us. Then shall we have enough, and more than shall suffice us; which shall be the best hospital that ever was founded for us. Then shall we daily pray to God, for your most noble estate long to endure.

Domine, salvum fac Regem.

Or,

'God save the King.'